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GERMAN DEFENSIVE CAPABILITIES

Summary and Conclusions

1. German defensive capabilities are being tested on the economic, military, and political fronts. The economic front is strongest. There are elements of weakness in the German military position which, if United Nations' pressure is increased and sustained, could soon bring armed resistance to an end; there are also important elements of strength which, if the weaknesses are not properly exploited, could permit the Nazis to gain many of their ends by dragging the war out to an inconclusive finish. Political conditions are closely economic and military developments; however, certain independent elements of weakness could conceivably be utilized to speed military collapse.

2. (a) Germany's war economy is strained and production of many key items is at a bare minimum. The basic position is still strong, however, and could probably sustain a longer military effort than that of Russia. In industrial and transport equipment generally the German position will remain fairly comfortable; the latter will improve as the Germans retreat. Germany's position in nutrition and basic raw materials is better in 1943 than in 1918, but in materiel and manpower it is worse. Her chances of survival in the face

Is position in materiel worse? In productive manpower 1943 position is much better than 19. In military manpower is it clearly worse?

of a heavy, sustained offensive are no better than in 1918, but her capabilities against a limited attack are better. Loss of the economic resources of satellite and occupied countries would not significantly reduce German supplies of civilian essentials; and even the curtailment in industrial materials (oil, alloy steel, non-ferrous metals, and wood, primarily) resulting from territorial losses at the periphery would hardly change front-line defensive strength for many months, although it would create serious problems of adjustment and deepen the conviction of defeat.

2. (b) The key factor in the economic position is precision bombing. Area bombing, which has created extensive damage in an important though limited sector of industrial Germany, offers no early prospect of inducing decisive economic anemia unless area raids in daylight become possible. Except for the danger from flak, this result might be achieved by concentrated precision attack against fighter aircraft production from North Italian bases. The strategic importance of an early acquisition of these bases can hardly be exaggerated, since they would bring within short range many major plants now inaccessible or difficult to reach from England. Precision bombing may also prove capable of reducing significantly the flow to the front of other important military products -- motor fuel, tanks, vehicles; but German powers of repelling or absorbing precision air attack have yet to be fully tested. More in doubt than the ultimate

consequences of strategic bombing are the costs and the time involved in reaching a favorable decision.

3. (a) The outstanding weakness in the German military situation is the marked inferiority in replacement power -- productive resources and men -- to that of her enemies; Germany's great strength is her marked superiority of geographical position. The size and effectiveness of the German army have begun a slow but inescapable decline, though production of defensive weapons has been stepped up. The Russians have devoted the resources of their economy so thoroughly to war that for another year or so they can maintain a considerable superiority in equipment and military manpower on the Eastern Front at a high level of expenditure. Anglo-American strength is also well on the way to equalling or exceeding that of the Axis. Every advantage of terrain, on the other hand, lies with Germany. In Russia, the battle front is still far from vital German areas; Norway could, at best, be a base from which to launch an amphibious attack across German-controlled waters; in Italy and the Balkans, mountain barriers greatly ease the task of defensive troops; in France, deep coastal defenses must be penetrated rapidly and in large force to prevent effective counter-attacks against weak beach-holdings. Those physical factors help to offset the relative German deficiency in military manpower and equipment.

too narrow; I suggest positive

3. (b) The big factor in the German military situation is shortage of reserves. Except for aircraft, the shortage is

too mild. Men in essential employment, except highly trained experts could be replaced and loss of output might be acceptable. Virtually all men below their middle thirties are in armed forces. Only older men available.

or forties?

probably less serious in equipment than in men. There is little depth of air strength and current wastage and production are about in balance. Increased pressure in the air war, therefore, must result either in a lowered scale of German resistance or a further decline in reserve air strength. But for other expendable items -- tanks, mobile artillery, and trucks, especially -- the situation is believed less serious, while Germany's replacement powers are vastly inferior in every respect to those of her opponents combined, it is not believed that the present scale of warfare in Europe has forced Germany to take losses in excess of new production. Only increased military pressure, or successful strategic bombing, can force a decline in German holdings of equipment.

3. (c) Most serious, probably, is the German shortage of military manpower. Replacement of losses is no longer possible. All males capable of bearing arms are in military service or essential employment. There is no reason to suppose that the annual intake of young men will be greater than the losses through superannuation. Further casualties are thus bound to reduce the combat forces. In respect to their reserves of military manpower the Germans now find themselves in a position somewhat analagous to that before the great [illegible] of March-July 1918. At that time they had an army of about 5,100,000 men which was reduced by average casualties of 230,000 a month to 4,200,000 in July. In June of this year the Germans had an army of 6,800,000, and they have since

been suffering irreplaceable casualties of 100,000 to 150,000 a month. In the 1918 German offensive, however, all reserves were utilized in a last gamble to win. In 1943 the German army is larger and the casualty rate is smaller. The strategy is defensive, the tactics those of withdrawing under pressure while exacting a relatively high price from their opponents. There is no assurance that the present rate of activity, if sustained, will soon reduce the German armies to that state of disheartened disorganization that characterized them in the late summer and fall of 1918.

3. (d) An important element in this situation is the length of time over which the Russians can sustain their present rate of operations. From the manpower standpoint the Russians can easily outlast the Germans. Russia's combat forces total about 11,000,000, and her remaining reserves are even larger despite the heavy casualties suffered. It is possible, however, that the difficult food situation and other factors will prevent the Russian armies from fully exploiting their manpower advantage by maintaining pressure until German troops, exhausted and hopeless of victory, consider further resistance fruitless. Assurance of this possible outcome would be increased in proportion to the increase of Anglo-American military pressure.

4. (a) The timing, locale, and strength of Anglo-American military operations against the continent is

undoubtedly a matter of considerable concern to the German High Command. In a persistent two-front defensive war Germany cannot fail to yield to the superior staying-power of her enemies. To win, or to avoid outright defeat, Germany must, if possible, avoid this situation. One method of doing so would be to drive a political wedge between her opponents. This tactic has so far failed because of its clear incompatibility with the self-interests of Germany's enemies. For the present, therefore, hope must rest primarily on some contemplated military action, an offensive coup designed to achieve an objective of major, perhaps decisive, importance. Those who expect a German offensive in Russia this year may have been wholly right in their interpretation of German character but wrong in their appraisal of German strategy. Reappraisal, in the light of existing capabilities, suggests the following possible line of German thought:

a) The great threat on the economic front is from the air. Concentration on production of fighter a/c and development of new defensive weapons and tactics, ~~will permit~~ may avert, and will at last begin) a serious reduction in war output ~~to be avoided~~.

b) On the military front the prime requisites are two: (1) to avoid a major break-through by enemy forces at any point; (2) to avoid an over-all scale of fighting so great that losses will persistently exceed replacement power for men and equipment.

c) For the first requirement, it is only necessary to oppose attack at any point with a force which is sufficient, if deployed, to take full advantage of natural and artificial defenses, to hold the enemy or execute a slow, orderly retreat. Except in Russia, this requirement can be met at all points around Europe with a relatively small number of divisions. In Italy, probably, the actual scale of German defense will be somewhat above this strategic minimum because of the great importance of North Italian air bases. Postponement of effective Anglo-American use of these bases until the spring of 1944 might make the difference between successful and unsuccessful German defense against precision bombing.

d) To satisfy the second prime military requirement Germany probably plans to withdraw under pressure in Russia whenever encirclement is the alternative to retreat, husbanding resources so as to transfer a considerable number of divisions from East to West whenever an opportunity for delivering a smashing blow at an Anglo-American invasion appears to present itself. The advantages of this strategy would be

1) The transfer of troops from the East with the line still well in Russian territory would, at worst, speed the subsequent rate of withdrawal,

These factors depend on rates of withdrawal as much as on actual position of front

with no worse result than the sacrifice of (Russian) space for time.

2) The farther west the Eastern front is at any time the smaller will be German requirements for successful defense; similarly, Russian difficulties of centering the offensive increase: railways change gauge; transport distances increase; the conquest of foreign territory ceases to call forth from Russian troops and people the same scale of effort and sacrifice. Why?

3) With the passage of time the dissipation of Russia's economic reserves begins to tell;

4) Thus there is good probability that a considerable number of German troops can be transferred from East to West without great risk of a Russian break through. And if this strategy should also result in defeat of the Anglo-American forces in the West, German victory would be virtually assured. The political balance of the war would be turned entirely in Germany's favor. A second invasion attempt in the West would take a long time to organize, and might never be attempted. Germany would have time to deal with an exhausted Russia single-handed and then make her arrangements with the Western powers. The possible gains are so great as to justify

Not enough to avoid a break-thru? Germany can lose thru attrition.

Failure to achieve a break thru does not imply that invasion has failed. Hitler front may be ~~spread~~

Do you mean that Germany was not defeated in 1918?

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almost any risk.

5) In fact, the real risk is small. The number of German troops transferred from the East need never be so great as to guarantee defeat in that quarter. And if the resulting effort in the West is too weak to be successful, the German armies may nevertheless create a situation like that in 1918 in which, having convinced the Anglo-American powers that military defeat of Germany is still a long and costly process, a "mutually advantageous" deal can be made. It is at this point that the anti-Communist political weapon is again likely to be used, for in these circumstances its potency would be much greater than now.

4. (b) Germany's success in carrying out this defensive strategy depends on her capabilities. The view has been expressed that from the economic point of view they are adequate. It has been suggested that in the military sphere they may well be adequate, but this is a matter for decision by military experts. It remains to consider whether Germany's political capabilities are equal to the task of holding on for a year or two longer: Will German civilian and troop morale permit the military capabilities to be fully exploited?

5. (a) The political situation is the most difficult to appraise. Hope of victory is vanishing; the conviction of

defeat is growing. German satellites and friends already appear to regret their association and to be watchful of opportunity to shift allegiance on favorable terms; nearby neutrals are taking a stiffer line with respect to German demands.

(b). Successful propaganda, however, has insulated German troops and, to a lesser extent, civilians from the full impact of the war's adversity at sea, on the ground, and in the air. Careful propaganda has also been designed to implant the conviction that defeat means annihilation. Russia, alone among the United Nations, has taken effective steps to weaken this conviction.

(c). Equally studied, and perhaps more dangerous, is the propaganda which seeks to align all non-communists against Russia and to drive a wedge of mutual distrust between Russia and her allies. This weapon is likely to increase in effectiveness with Russian military success. Recently, however, the Nazi propaganda line for <u>internal</u> consumption has taken the line that no split among Germany's opponents is possible, and that a long war is the consequent prospect. Externally, however, all signs of political difference continue to be exploited. This dual line is wholly consistent with the hypothesis concerning Nazi strategy presented above.

6. (a) At least two conditions must be satisfied if the German will to resist is to weaken: (1) Conviction of defeat

must become well-nigh universal, and (2) Some basis for hope in the post-war world must be provided. German control of the news is such that, regardless of the facts, it will be extremely difficult for those conditions to be met. And even if the conditions are satisfied, fear of punishment may hold workers and troops in line. It may well be that the first condition for German collapse is open disagreement between the Nazis, the industrialists, and the Army, in the struggle for power. Only after such an event has weakened State powermay the people be expected to take matters into their own hands.

(b). How quickly this point will be reached will not be decided by moves and counter-moves in any one sphere of action, whether economic or military or political. The actual course of events is a resultant of forces converging from all three directions. These forces, moreover, cannot be compounded by a simple law of addition; their interdependence is complex and mutually reinforcing.

Conclusion. Combined attack on German economic, military, and political weaknesses cannot fail to bring a quick end to the war. A piecemeal program will mean prolongation of the war and may, for reasons stated, prejudice the ultimate outcome. The combined attack should be carried out:

a. On the economic, or home front, by strategic bombing of targets chosen with an eye to early victory. Bombing cannot be hidden, and brings the hopelessness of the situation directly to the people. Area bombing does so directly, and

if long continued against a single city or region, may lead to nervous exhaustion. Precision bombing, by destroying industrial targets of known military importance, rather than houses and historic landmarks, whose loss may rouse the stubborn anger of the people, does this even more effectively than area bombing.

b. On the military front, by launching a large-scale Anglo-American land offensive at some point or points on the European continent before the Germans can safely disengage large forces into the East. This attack could have one or both of two objectives: (1) to engage the largest possible number of enemy troops and inflict high wastage on them; this would suggest a cross-Channel operation rather than peripheral attack; (2) to shake loose from Germany as rapidly as possible her several allies with a view to inducing a political drift among German satellites and neutrals that would end only in collapse of Germany itself; this might best be accomplished by a series of simultaneous peripheral operations in Norway, Italy, and the Balkans, but it is more probable that the long-anticipated invasion of French, Belgian, or Dutch soil would have far greater political repercussions than any other military success could hope to achieve.

c. On the political front, by announcement of an Anglo-Russian-American agreement on treatment of Germany. This would reveal a degree of solidarity among the three powers that would kill the anti-communist propaganda line and

strengthen underground resistance groups whose dreams of peace must be clouded by existing doubts (which we do nothing to allay) concerning capitalist-communist relations after the war; and it would show the German people and their allies that fighting and dying for Nazis or militarists is not the only, and certainly not the best, hope the future holds in store for them.